

Answering the Call: Honoring Dr. King Through Mental Health Advocacy & Community Care

By Mark T. Williams, Board Trustee

This Martin Luther King Jr. Day, we reflect on Dr. King's enduring legacy: a relentless pursuit of justice, equality, and beloved community. He taught us that *"Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve."* This year, we are called to extend that service to a critical, yet often overlooked, dimension of our community's well-being: Mental Health.

In New Jersey, 1 in 5 adults experiences a mental health condition each year. The need for support, understanding, and compassionate action has never been greater. Stigma still silences too many of our neighbors, friends, and family members, creating barriers to care and connection that Dr. King would challenge us to dismantle.

This is not just a health issue; it is a social justice issue. Access to care, equitable resources, and freedom from discrimination are pillars of the mental health movement that align directly with Dr. King's dream of a just society.

How You Can Serve & Strengthen Our Community Any Day

Dr. King's vision was built on active love and collective action. Here's how you can honor his legacy:

1. **Volunteer Your Time:** Become a support group facilitator, a community educator, or a helpline responder. Your lived experience or compassionate ear can be a lifeline.
2. **Educate Yourself & Others:** Attend a Mental Health First Aid workshops. Understanding is the first step toward erasing stigma.
3. **Advocate for Change:** Urge our lawmakers to prioritize mental health funding and policies that ensure no one is left behind.
4. **Start the Conversation:** In your faith groups, book clubs, and neighborhood gatherings, share resources and speak openly about mental wellness. Create circles of care where you live.
5. **Donate:** Your financial support allows us to expand our programs, reaching more families and individuals across our service area.

A Day On, Not a Day Off: Join a Day of Service

We invite you to make it a "Day On" for mental health.

- **Pledge** to have one supportive conversation about mental health.
- **Share** resources on your social media platform to break the silence.

- **Sign up** to volunteer.

Together, we can build a New Jersey where every individual, regardless of their mental health journey, is met with compassion, support, and access to hope.

“The time is always right to do what is right.” – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.